

EVERYBODY knows that the child is the father of Man. This fact signifies the importance of any child in society."

A child's growth will correspond to the type of nourishment it receives in its early age. Old people are heard saying that they are indebted to the solid and pure food they received in childhood and that keeps them active and vibrant even today.

The days when caring for a child was taken as child's play are now long gone. The two World Wars, followed by fatal diseases, have awakened the conscience of Man. Humanity, at large, has become cautious and aware of the rapid increase in the mortality rate of children.

WHO and Unicef teams have toured the whole world, specially the poor countries, and provided them with medicine in addition to the teaching of new techniques to combat diseases among children. Governments were assisted financially and told to devise programmes for extending facility to the children in order for them to become healthy and able citizens. Efforts are continuously being made to create a congenial and pollution-free atmosphere for the young generation. Breathing in open and pure air by our children is the need of the day. Governments have now become very serious and responsive towards child health. Research and studies are being conducted and care for both mother and child are hot topics for discussion in today's health programmes.

The theme of this year for children is peace and harmony. The fact is that much more peace and harmony prevailed in the bygone years when children had never seen or heard about pollution, ethnic prejudices, smoke, overflowing sewers, drug addiction, etc. Yes, of course, children had the taste of frequent beating and caning by teachers during their school days. But this kind of physical punishment generally proved to be a blessing in disguise. Since these remedial measures were free of callousness, every child received it with an open heart and termed it in the words of our national poet, Allama Iqbal, "as a means to excel in life."

By all means, a child was taken thus by neighbours, relatives and parents alike; simultaneously children also remained in their shoes and respected the elders. Generally, grandmothers and Imams of the neighbourhood guided the grooming of a child's personality. Tales narrated at night, generally by elders, were heard amid pin-drop silence, utter involvement and absorption. It was certainly not a tale told by the village idiot, as mused by Shakespeare. Lifestyles have now changed now. A child opens his eye in a different world. Today, the child has to live in a global village. It is no more child's play. The Universal Children's Day is celebrated in the United Nations'

Being a child is no child's play

BY M. SALEEM ANSARI

Children

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DAWN
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member states around the world with main focus on the rights of the child. Conventions, seminars and symposia, including children's rallies, are organized to mark the significance of the day in a befitting manner.

There was a time when children were unfamiliar with the trials and tribulations of life. Their routine was limited to playing, eating and sleeping. William Blake in his poem, *The Echoing Green*, says, "Till the little ones weary no more can be merry/The sun does descend/And our sports have an end/Round laps of their mothers/Many sisters and brothers/Like birds in their nest/Are ready to rest."

The happiness and innocence of a child's first thoughts about life are expressed by poets and writers in simple and lovely diction. The stories having a fairy atmosphere, are read and enjoyed by the children. Children do not have any idea of what we describe as absent or as not present at all. Things remain the same, and the world continues to be busy and beautiful, but the happy moments of one's life (childhood) never stay. Childhood is sweet. William Wordsworth in the poem, *The Two April Mornings*, says, "To see a child so very fair/It was a pure delight/She seemed as happy as a wave/That dances on the sea."

The child of the past was interested in listening to stories of spirits, fairies and deities. It is said that at the famous place of Devband, djinns'

resounding music or noise. It started with the setting of the sun and was completed by Isha prayers. A calm and contented atmosphere prevailed. The fun and frolics of the children were simple, straight and full of joy and happiness. Children were told to play in the vicinity of the neighbourhood. In the evening, children gathered and played cost-effective, affordable sports such as football, gulli-danda, gram, bante/kanche for boys; hide and seek and such for girls.

The fresh air, friendly and congenial environment gave children a sense of belonging, love and compassion. Pollution-free, fresh water was drunk directly from the hand pump. Simple jokes and tricks were played without any confrontation or conflict.

Earlier parents were also not worried about their children's admission to schools. No birth certificate or any recommendation was required. A nearby school was preferred, otherwise, after an appropriate and considerable passage of time, the child was sent to a school a little farther away. Special facilities in the school were never demanded nor desired. The students were seated on the ground and the teacher sat on a small plank of wood in order to become visible.

In comparison, the children of today need registration in a school at least one year before the admission process starts. High fee, time-consum-

children also used to get Islamic education in the mosque. Once the *maulvi sahib*, during a lesson, asked a child to fetch water. He extended his hand and at once presented a glass of water. This incident, of course, frightened the other children.

In the good old days, films for the recreation of children were the likes of *Superman*. That was the beginning of the opening of a whole new world for children. A child was satisfied with the simple and solid eatables present all around. Eating was done without any

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Sing admission procedures and allied problems such as conveyance, books and heavy bags are also faced by students and parents alike. Indeed, to be a child today is no child's play.

Children's problems and agonies are addressed promptly, if not in developing countries, then at least in advanced countries. However, the electronic media has succeeded in bringing to light the plight of child labour in restaurant, workshops, carpet industry, kilns, agriculture fields and private houses due to deprivation and exploitation. The other causes are related to family size, illiteracy and poverty. Globally, there are over 250 million working children and a majority of them live in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Studies now show a one per cent increase in school enrolment and 0.35pc decrease in child labour. Similarly, one per cent increase in female education results in 0.5pc decrease in child labour.

What a tremendous change has occurred in the pastime ways of children. Today, a child does not want to play barefooted. He is unaware of fresh water direct from the hand pump. He is not interested in simple, action-free stories. Thus, films are made accordingly for children. Movies such as *Problem Child*, *Exorcist*, *Matilda*, *Little Rascals*, *Sixth Sense*, *Harry Potter*, etc, deal with themes such as horror, fear, adventure, thrills, etc. Thrill is not only found in entertainment, but it has also not spared during meals. No eating is done without the TV or the radio. Fast food and quick meals are gifts for the child of today. Life has become fast. The child of today has many commitments to attend to. A child of today carries a schoolbag too heavy to carry. Mothers pluck them directly from beds and load them into school vans. Still half-asleep, half-awake, they land into classrooms with lunch boxes in their bags.

In school, the child studies as many subjects as possible to prove him as a promising child. In the afternoon, the children return to their homes worn and torn with work and fatigue. The *maulvi sahib* is already present, waiting to teach him the Holy Quran. The child hardly finishes his lunch before getting busy playing computer games. As evening sets in, cartoons are shown on TV and thanks to cable TV, there is no dearth of entertainment on the TV. Cycling is the only game or exercise to be enjoyed by him. Eating continues intermittently by having chips, ice cream, popcorn, etc. All these things are eaten while walking or gossiping and without becoming stationary. This is fast food and fast life.

This is the requirement of global village life. Those who cannot keep pace with the fast-moving world, will lag behind and become lost, never to be found again. No doubt, to be the child of today is no child's play. ■